



Media release

The Place To Be

From the Premier and the Minister for Tourism

Wednesday 9 February 2005

COMMONWEALTH GAMES UK TAXI AMBASSADORS WELCOMED

The Premier, Steve Bracks, today welcomed to Melbourne six United Kingdom taxi ambassadors who will be used to help promote Victoria in the lead up to the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

Mr Bracks said the ambassador campaign would raise awareness of Melbourne and Victoria as host of the 2006 Games, and as an attractive tourist destination, in the important UK market.

“London cabbies are renowned for their driving skills, their local knowledge and their willingness to strike up a conversation,” Mr Bracks said.

“Who better to promote the Commonwealth Games, Melbourne and Victoria in the UK?”

Mr Bracks said tourism was one of Victoria’s top 10 industries and contributed \$10.6 billion annually to the economy.

“Initiatives like this will spread positive messages about Victoria and help us attract an anticipated 40,000 international and 50,000 interstate visitors to the Games,” he said.

The Minister for Tourism, John Pandazopoulos, said the UK taxi ambassador program was part of a \$7.6 million M2006 marketing strategy to raise awareness of Melbourne and Victoria ahead of the Commonwealth Games.

The UK Taxi Ambassadors will spend the next week travelling along the Great Southern Touring Route, visiting Geelong, Bell’s Beach, Apollo Bay, Loch Ard Gorge, the Twelve Apostles, Halls Gap, Sovereign Hill and also Phillip Island.

They will also take in the main tourism attractions of Melbourne.

“This program allows them to experience the natural beauty and diversity of Victoria so that when they return home, they can talk about the attractions they have seen,” Mr Pandazopoulos said.

“They can also remind potential UK visitors that the next big sporting event in the world is right here in Melbourne.”

He said 25 transformed cabs had been on the streets of London bearing colourful images of the Twelve Apostles since late last year. A further 150 cabs have decorated sidings.

Mr Pandazopoulos said the original six London cab drivers will return to the UK and educate up to 200 other drivers to act as ambassadors for the Games.

“The United Kingdom is Victoria’s largest single international tourist market with 212,000 visitors for the year ending September 2004,” Mr Pandazopoulos said.

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“These visitors spent 5.2 million visitor nights in Victoria – an impressive increase of 28 per cent over the previous year. Of these, 31.3 % of them were visiting friends and relatives.

“We’re looking forward to the British coming to Victoria in force for the 2006 Games.”

Mr Bracks also congratulated the City of Melbourne and the Victorian Taxi Association for their support of the Melbourne Taxi Tourism Ambassador Program.

This program will result in Melbourne taxi drivers being trained as tourism ambassadors and linked into a new high-tech online tourism information update service in preparation for the 2006 Commonwealth Games.